DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 043 301 HE 001 771

AUTHOR Bebb, Ernest L., Jr.
TITLE The Urban Campus: No Longer an Atypical College Union Setting.
INSTITUTION Utah Univ., Salt Lake City.
PUB DATE Mar 70
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the 47th Annual Conference of the Association of College Unions-International, Houston, Texas, March 22-25, 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.60
DESCRIPTORS College Students, Educational Needs, *Higher Education, *Institutional Role, Relevance (Education), *Student Unions, *Urban Environment, *Urban Universities, Urban Youth

ABSTRACT

The traditional American concept of the college campus has been that of rolling campuses in the midwest and vine-covered buildings of the Ivy League. Yet the urban campus educates now more than one half of all college students. In design, the urban campus as a whole, and the union in particular, have followed the examples of their rural counterparts, without much attention to the needs of their urban environments. In addition to the traditional problems of the non-urban campus, the urban campus has a dropout rate of 60% - an indication that the education provided by these institutions is not suitable to many of their students. Parking is another serious problem that is often ignored. Because the library is often located far from any parking area, the union on an urban campus should provide study facilities for students, as well as some space where new faculty members could temporarily do some of their work. One of the roles of the urban university should be to give meaning to urban life and assist in creating a new image for our cities. Just as the urban university must reexamine its purposes, so must the urban unions. (AF)

ED043301

PROGRAM SESSION NO. 27

THE URBAN CAMPUS

47th ANNUAL CONFERENCE
ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGE UNIONS - INTERNATIONAL
HOUSTON, TEXAS
MARCH 22 - 25, 1970

THE URBAN CAMPUS: NO LONGER AN ATYPICAL COLLEGE UNION SETTING

Summary of Paper

The metropolitan city and a highly commuting student body once presented an almost unknown situation to the traditional college union concept. Today many of the most prominent unions in the country are found in just such locations. The task of the urban college or university is often altered by its metropolitan location; so it follows that the assigned responsibilities and resultant problems to the union are probably so influenced, either formally or informally.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Paper Presented by:

Ernest L. Bebb, Jr.
Director, University of Utah Union
University of Utah
Salt Lake City

HE001771

THE URBAN CAMPUS:
NO LONGER AN ATYPICAL COLLEGE UNION SETTING

While the title indicates that the urban campus may no longer be an atypical setting for a union, it should be remembered that it has really never been an atypical one for a university. This is in spite of the fact that the sprawling, rolling campuses of the midwest and the vine-covered buildings of the ivy league seem to dominate most Americans' conceptualizations of the typical college campus. Not a surprising view at all when one thinks of the dominant type of American campus from the enactment of the Morril Act of 1862 until the beginning of the post-World War II era when our state universities spread across the land. In Europe, on the other hand, the university tradition has been strikingly urban. Many of Europe's universities originated in medieval towns such as Bologna and Paris, and in more recent times in such cities as London, Manchester, Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfort, Milan, and Brussels. (K lotsche, 1966) Notable exceptions to this tradition were Oxford and Cambridge. . . the very institutions where college unions found their rudimentary beginnings. If, therefore, Americans find the urban setting for a university somewhat foreign or atypical to their view of a college or university campus, it is not surprising that college unions also find the metropolitan scene a bit strange to their traditional concepts.

The facts are very real. The urban campus is fast becoming, if it has not already become, the more typical setting for the average American institution of higher learning. Peter Drucker has suggested that within a generation, resident campuses will have become obsolete except for graduate and professional education. By 1960 every American city with a population of over 200,000 had at least one degree granting institution, one-half of all students in degree granting institutions attended what are called urban colleges and universities, and more than one-half of all students in the United States live at home while pursuing their college education. (Klotsche, 1966) The urban campus and the commuting student are far from atypical at the beginning of the 'seventies.

> For universities located in large cities the problems of defining their role are especially difficult and complex, but one of conspicuous problem is this: our colleges and universities have a structure which appears to be based in every way upon the full-time resident student, yet today fewer than one-half of college students are residents. (Wallin, 1969)

If space has permitted, it seems that the usual appearance of urban universities, even with commuting populations which exceed 80 per cent, have been that of sprawling tree and mall-studded campuses with all the physical appearances of residential campuses except for the row upon row of residence halls. It would not be surprising to find their union buildings to be equally unadapted to their urban and commuter characteristics.

Because it appears that urban campuses as a whole have only veered from a residential design as a result of not being blessed with enough avail-

able land, perhaps many of their unions have 'veered' even less since land, as such, is less critical to a single university building than it is to an entire campus. Even then a traditionaly resident, campus-oriented union facility can go 'up' as well as 'out' without really compromising a single living-room-for-the-resident-student concept.

Perhaps we should discuss a few of the problems confronting the urban university as a whole, before we presumptuously isolate any significant ones which might apply to the union alone in such a setting. In reality it is very difficult to say that the primary major problems of urban universities are all that unique to them because of their cosmopolitan settings. The outward manifestations of those problems in the form of protest marches, riots to demand certain avowed rights, etc., may be more frequent on such campuses, for the present at least, but their real underlying concerns might very well be. . . or should be. . . the same throughout all institutions professing to offer a contemporary university education.

J. Martin Klotsche indicates that due to the urban students high inclination (and need) to work and even maintain full-time jobs that they become significantly more job-oriented in their academic goals than their contemporaries on residential campuses. Be that as it may, Ordway Tead's warning really applies to all colleges and universities when he stated,

> . . . our students have to be made to realize that they are not in college solely to get what they can in terms of self, in terms of economic advancement, and in terms of a grave psychological separation from the background out of which they have come. The college fails fatally if it does not help its graduates to realize that they are there to discover the

> directions in which the claims of truth and beauty and righteousness lie, and to become committed to those above and beyond the claims of a purely personal career. (Tead, 1946)

In David Boroff's Campus U.S.A., there is one grim statistic, to use the author's expression, although not unique to urban universities, but most likely more attributable to them than residential campuses: the student dropout rate is almost 60%. For more than half its clients, the services that colleges render is unsatisfactory - or the customers ill-chosen. In addition to indicating that the university is evidently either offering the wrong educational experience or offering it to the wrong clientele, Boroff continues by dividing institutions into two kinds: those which we might call adolescent reservations, fenced off from serious adult concerns, and those which represent a transition to adulthood and development of personal human values and true intellectual concerns.

While both Tead and Boroff's observations could apply to or be embraced by college unions, it is important to note that they are talking about higher education as a whole. In my estimation the most relevant and significant problems of the college union are those of our entire institutions, but the institutions as a whole do not have to solve them before we get to work.

In addition to many almost universal problems faced by today's universities and colleges, the urban institutions (and perhaps many of today's residential ones) have certain problems thrust on them in this country by their so long dominant agriculturally oriented sister institutions. For

instance: the three season academic calendar and the archaic notion that going to college means going 'away' to college. The latter has historically meant that American colleges and universities have assumed a custodial role regarding students which is essentially inconsistent, if not incompatible, with the personal freedoms that urban families allow their young. Governance of academic institutions, too, has its roots in the rural scene. The tradition of presidential authority which frequently continues today is no longer functionable in a large, complex institution located in an urban setting.

Then, of course, there are the many problems peculiar to and of the urban college and university's own making. Probably the most talked about as well as most misunderstood is the parking problem. It is usually compounded and often even more mishandled when the desire to have a 'walking' campus (with peripheral parking) captures the imagination of the architect as well as the ascetic and other wishes of the president and other politically influential authorities. Walking campuses, especially when walking really means jogging between classes, do look much more residential. More frequently than not the library is one of the farthest buildings from a student parking lot; no wonder students want to get the chore over with of getting off campus each day as soon as possible when it begins with a walk that might compete with the time it will actually take him to drive home.

> It may seem to many students that the difference in graduation time (i.e., nearly five years for urban, commuting students compared to four years which is more typical of resident students.) is largely a result of the time spent commuting and looking for a parking space. (Wallin, 1969)

Urban institutions would do well to place proportionately as much educational importance and monetary resources in the relationship of the student (and faculty member) and his automobile as do residential institutions on students and their living situations. Unions on such campuses would do well to re-evaluate giving (or fighting for) the best parking places adjacent to the union only to visitors, conference delegates, and other 'commercial' patrons. If parents of teenagers too often feel that the automobile is a potential motel on wheels, they might be surprised to find that their commuting collegians often find them to be the best (as 'bad' as that might be) study spot they have.

I long ago changed my mind that college unions are not for study. . . especially on the commuter campus. Family homes, as wholesome and good-food-endowed as they may be, are usually poor settings for concentrated study. The TV, younger brothers and sisters, family demands, and even students' own children are almost unsurmountable agents of distraction. And let's forget always suggesting sending them to the library. . . residence halls do not do that for routine study and course work preparation. Why not really provide a living room for the young adult with a study room complete with coffee and snacks to the commuter? Such areas will not be very income-producing and hardly programmable, but they might be very valuable to the student who identifies the university synonymously only with a classroom.

Julian Levi, a major figure in the redevelopment of the area surrounding the University of Chicago, points out:

> a university must be a community of scholars, not a collection of scholarly commuters. The cross-fertilization of many disciplines and fields, so essential to productive research and teaching, is possible only when a university community exists as a place of residence. (Levi, 1961)

In addition to encouraging the urban university to assure that its surrounding residential area is one in which faculty would want to live, he suggests that the library corrals be made more readily available to faculty (especially newer, younger ones) who might be without suitable private office space and need blocks of time to concentrate on preparation for the next class or to meet with students doing independent study. Why not consideration of such space in the union for temporary use (not, of course, for research, disertation preparation, etc.).

The advantages of the urban setting where the entire community is a laboratory are really more numerous to the contemporary university than its problems; even if such advantages are often overshadowed and forgotten, especially in the press and by the legislature. No community that is unwilling to understand them (these advantages, together with their attendant problems) can expect to be the home of an important intellectual center. (Mayhew, 1969) Despite the advantages there are, however, also certain undeniable limitations.

> The transition from high school to college for an urban university student is much more gradual than for those who are leaving home for the first time to attend college at a distance. Hence, change for the urban student is not nearly as marked, and the transition somewhat easier. This fact often makes it difficult for the student to accept an image of the university that sets it apart from his

> earlier education. Urban universities have not succeeded in establishing in their students an understanding of those unusual characteristics of a university that distinguish it from their high school experiences. (Klotsche, 1966)

I can't think of a better problem for the urban college union to take upon itself with the university than that one. But, it must continually re-evaluate its involvement or it might easily find it is in reality working at cross purposes and actually be a major hindrance to the solution of the problem. To paraphrase what many believe when they say the drug scene of the 'sixties has dropped right through the colleges to the high schools, student activities (the kind so popular in the 'fifties) for the most part did the same long ago.

> Our society is irretrievably urban. Since our cities are here to stay, the time is at hand to take a new look at them. It (the urban university) can, in fact, become the single most important force in the recreation of our cities. It is equipped to perform a task that no other institution can do as well. Here, then, is a unique role for our universities, that of giving meaning to urban life and assisting in the creation of a new image for our cities.

As for college unions, perhaps a new breed will emerge or is emerging. Not in spite of, but because of the successes and failures of their predecessors, only they will no longer simply be made-over, high-rise versions of their resident campus contemporaries and they will no longer try to make the out-of-classroom life just as good as going away to school for the urban student. And a new interdependence with the whole university is in order.

REFERENCES

Boroff, Davis, Campus U.S.A., New York, New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1961.

Klotsche, J. Martin, The Urban University: and the Future of our Cities, New York, New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966.

Levi, Julian, "The Influence of Environment on Urban Institutions," Educational Record, April 1961, Washington D. C.: American Council on Education, p. 137.

Mayhew, Lewis B., Colleges Today and Tomorrow, San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 1969.

Wallin, Franklin, project director for a study of the commuting student's environment at Wayne State University financed by a grant from the Educational Facilities Laboratories, Inc., 1969.